

9-1-2000

# Cultivating Discerning Minds in Caring Hearts: My First Year at Seattle University

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### Recommended Citation

Murphy, S.J., Thomas (2000) "Cultivating Discerning Minds in Caring Hearts: My First Year at Seattle University," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 18, Article 9.

Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol18/iss1/9>

plative art of seeing, to a state of openness, revelation, and understanding. . I believe this approach—developed in the context of a Jesuit Mission, conjoining intellect and spirituality—could and should have much broader implications for the field of art history. Moreover, in the face of the horrific, coarsening, and desensitizing effect of much of today's popular media culture—I offer television's "The Sopranos" as *prima facie* evidence—I firmly believe that a renewed quest for the humanizing value of appreciative, creative seeing provides a viable, teachable pathway to an awareness of compassion and social justice.

"Living the Mission" most assuredly will require that all of us involved by choice or desire, rather than by definition, in mission-oriented vision and endeavors will need to work hard to position spirituality and faith so as to be accepted as genuine matters of intellectual—yes, of scholarly—life. Toward that end, I would invoke a note of hope: that academia, and especially art history, will harken to Philosophy when it says, with Homer, that a divinely, beautifully crafted piece of work is indeed a "wonder to behold" and that through making and learning to see such works, as art history promises, the "order of the heavens can be made to appear."

## Cultivating Discerning Minds in Caring Hearts:

*My First Year at Seattle University*

THOMAS MURPHY S.J.

Paul Sato (a pseudonym) enrolled in my course "Origins of Western Civilization" this past spring quarter. At the very end of the term, he introduced me to his mother. Paul is rather illustrative of my students—a person of mixed European and Asian heritage, of great caring, and of no particular religious background or practice. However, I heard Paul tell his mother that, for him, the most memorable feature of my course was our discussion of the effect of religious feelings on history. He had never considered such a connection before. Paul's perspective confirmed some discernments about my ministry that I had made over the course of my first year as both a Jesuit priest and an assistant professor of history at Seattle University. One is that relatively unchurched students can be reached through study of the interrelationship between religion and civilization. The other is that both students and colleagues look for ways to unite discernment of thoughts and feelings. As priest and professor, I have come to realize that I am qualified to assist in the cultivation of both skills.

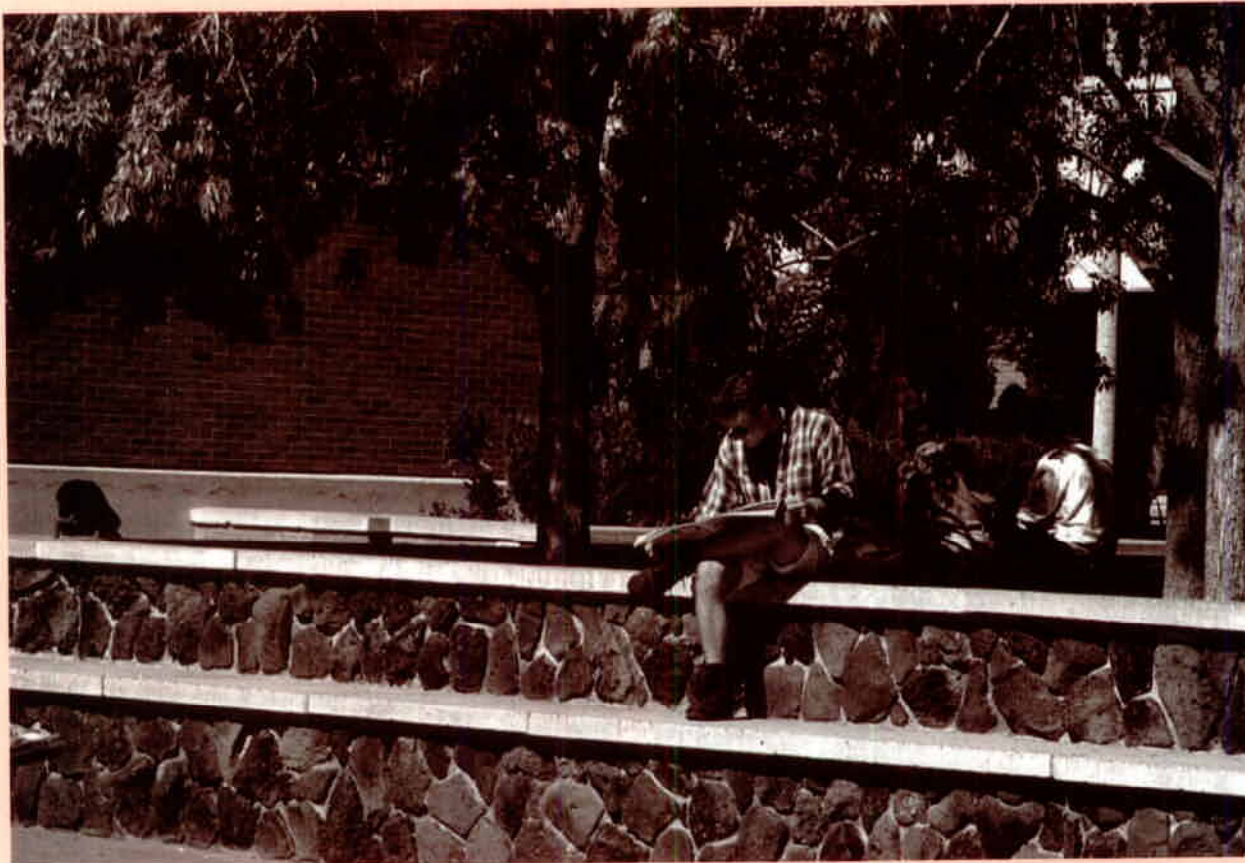
These discoveries have been possible not only through my developing a capacity to distinguish my own formative experiences from those of my students, but also

through my realization of how much I have in common with my colleagues. My students are well in touch with their feelings, less so with their intellects. I think that for my colleagues, both Jesuit and lay, the opposite may well be the case. The call to balance the two aspects of feeling and thought is precisely the place where faculty and students have much to teach one another and where Jesuit higher education has the most capacity to change decision-making in the United States today.

I first encountered higher education ministry in the Jesuit tradition when I enrolled at The College of the Holy Cross in the class of 1981. The four years I spent in Worcester were a time when the Ignatian perspective opened first my mind, then my heart. When students complain to me that college course offerings seem little different topically from courses they took in high school, I remember that I responded much the same way at first to my own college courses. However, Holy Cross taught me how to think about seemingly familiar material in fresh ways. Learning how to teach in the same way is my great challenge as a new professor.

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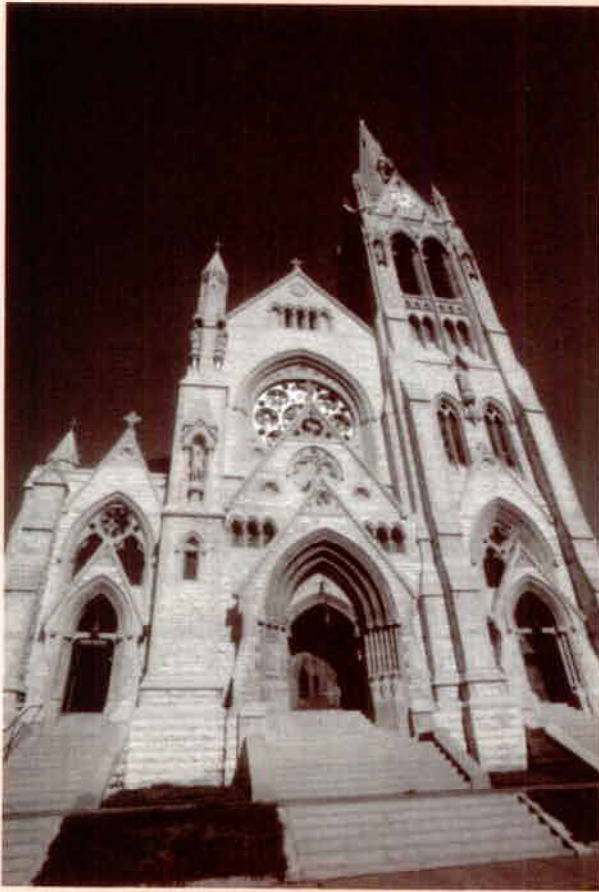
Having grown up in a loyal but relatively unquestioning Catholic home, I came to college with much basic knowledge of Catholicism, but little experience of critical thinking about it. My present students seem to lack basic knowledge of any organized religion. Therefore, I try to show them how religious thinking has affected some general cultural perspectives that they already seem familiar with.

My doctoral dissertation offers an opportunity to do this. It is on the slaveholdings of the American Jesuits before the Civil War—a most emotional topic. Students already know much about slavery, and are frequently outraged to realize that organized religion promoted such cruelty. Precisely because of their aggrieved feelings, however, the topic also offers the chance to show how analysis cannot proceed to corrective action unless it evolves beyond raw anger. Thoughtfulness is required in order to discern how Christian people constructed a moral universe in which slaveholding was something to be approved. In my Western Civilization course we have considered some other emotional topics, such as the Church's mistreatment of Jews, Moslems, and religious dissidents. That Pope John Paul II has led the Church in repentance for much of this history during the Jubilee

Year of Reconciliation in both a moving and thoughtful way has made my approach in the classroom more pertinent. I have also encouraged my students to see how raw emotion often distorts voting in the United States today, leading to public decisions that are emotional but not particularly thoughtful.

I do not want my students to repudiate their emotions, however, but merely learn to apply them thoughtfully. When my mother died suddenly during my student days at Holy Cross, I first tried to cope with overwhelming grief by withdrawing into a completely intellectual world. Fortunately, I just then encountered the affective side of Ignatian spirituality through some dedicated campus ministers and counselors. Thanks to their revival of my heart, I was able to enter the Society of Jesus and persevere to ordination. Twelve years of preparation for priesthood demanded of me not only intellectual skill, but love. I am convinced that when we deal with historical issues of injustice, whether in religious or secular matters, the same combination of thinking and caring is needed in order to set anything right.

For these reasons I see the cultivation of a thoughtful mind in a caring heart as the way to unite the myri-



ad projects in which a new priest and professor is called to participate. The celebration of liturgy affords the challenge of preparing homilies that can both invite reflection and prompt action. Confessions, retreat work, and other spiritual counseling introduce me to the emotion-

al issues that accompany students in their classroom analysis each day. Occasional work at a youth detention center helps me to feel and think about the local injustices that Seattle University feels called to address before and with the Pacific Northwest community.

So far, my interaction with colleagues has been mainly through my participation in two hires that my department conducted this year. The hours we spent together taught us much about one another, and the hundreds of files we read taught us much about the higher education community in the United States. All of us wanted to hire people who combined skills of mind and heart. Although it was difficult, we believe that it proved possible. Still, the process taught us that not every area of higher education cultivates this combination and that the Ignatian tradition has much to contribute to the profession in that regard.

One final thought that I carry from my involvement with Jesuit higher education is that we appeal to a more diverse constituency of students than we may think. I have now taught at two fine but very different Jesuit schools, Fairfield and Seattle. As a member of the New England Province, I was in my home territory at Fairfield, in perhaps the most culturally Catholic section of the nation. At Seattle, the surroundings are less obviously Catholic, but I find that students in both schools are united by a deep yearning for truth. All of them want to find something deeper than that with which they entered college. I am convinced that balancing the discernment of minds and hearts is the way to lead those students to their treasure.



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